Agenda of the SAARC Summit

948. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister attended the SAARC Summit at Dhaka, recently;

(b) if so, the details thereof including the leaders of the other countries participated in the Summit;

(c) the agenda of the Summit and the consensus arrived at the Summit;

(d) the features of the joint declaration made at the end of the Summit; and

(e) the view points put forth by India at the Summit and the response of other countries thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHMMED): (a) The Indian delegation, consisting of Prime Minister, Minister of State for External Affairs (EA), Foreign Secretary and other senior officials of the Government of India, took part in the Thirteenth SAARC Summit held in Dhaka on November 12-13, 2005.

(b) The King of Nepal, the Presidents of Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan also participated in the Summit.

(c) to (e) The Summit had an exhaustive agenda. India participated actively in both the preparations for the Summit as well as in its deliberations at Dhaka. The Summit Declaration incorporates many of the new proposals made by India. The major achievements of the Summit are in consonance with India's objectives and provide new opportunities to further the process of regional economic integration in South Asia.

India had taken a strong initiative to ensure the entry of Afghanistan as a new member of SAARC. The consensus decision taken by the SAARC Heads of State and Government to welcome Afghanistan as SAARC's eighth member is a major success for Indian diplomacy. With Afghanistan's entry, SAARC would acquire a more complete regional identity, and a country with which India has traditionally close and friendly relations would become part of SAARC.

The Summit noted the renewed interest of other regional and international organizations, bodies and entities to cooperate with SAARC in fields of mutual interest. India has welcomed the interest shown by China as well as Japan to be associated with SAARC as Observers. We would welcome similar association with other interested countries as well. It has been agreed that the Council of Ministers will decide the modalities in this regard in their meeting in July, 2006.

The Summit was also notable for the signing of three very important trade facilitation agreements. These include:

* The Agreement on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Customs Matters
* The Agreement on the Establishment of SAARC Arbitration Council
* The Limited Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters

India's offer for hosting the SAARC Centre for Disaster Management and Preparedness has been welcomed and accepted by the Summit. This is an important development, considering the extensive loss of life and property due to natural disasters such as the Tsunami and earthquakes, which have affected our region during the past one year. There was a clear recognition that we need a permanent regional response mechanism dedicated to disaster preparedness, emergency relief and rehabilitation. India's record and demonstrated capabilities in this regard helped in ensuring the success of our proposal to host the Centre in India. This Centre will be closely associated with the National Institute for Disaster Management in Delhi.

India has long argued that if South Asia is to become a dynamic component of the larger process of regional cooperation and globalization that is taking place in the world, it must first bring about economic integration amongst the member countries, as an essential pre-requisite. India put forward a bold new vision of a SAARC, which is interconnected, where political divisions do not stand in the way of the free movement of peoples, goods and services, and ideas, across our region. In this context, India offered, on a reciprocal basis, transit facilities to all countries of the region and also greater air connectivity through a virtual open skies arrangement. India took the lead in drafting a strong political message that there should be no delay in the operationalisation of the SAFTA (South Asia Free Trade Area) Agreement.

The proposal made by India for the setting up of a South Asia University that would bring together scholars, scientists and students from all over South Asia in a centre of excellence was welcomed enthusiastically.

The Summit has also noted with appreciation some other important proposals made by India, such as the setting up of a Regional Food Bank, a Regional Tele-Medicine Network, setting up of SAARC Museum of Textiles and Handicrafts to preserve and foster this valuable legacy of handicrafts and textiles, and the holding of a SAARC Car Rally in the run up to the 14th SAARC Summit, which will be held in India in the first quarter of 2007. We intend to develop these ideas further in close consultation with our SAARC partners.

A major theme at the Summit was cooperation in counter terrorism. There is a very strong condemnation of terrorism in the Summit Declaration and renewed commitment to eliminate this scourge, both from the region as well as from the world. For the first time, there is also a clear reference to avoid double standards in tackling this collective challenge. This is a major achievement of the Summit, and is entirely in line with India's own foreign policy objectives.

The Summit was a landmark event, which took place as SAARC enters the third decade of its existence. There was a strong sentiment amongst member countries that the time had come for us to move from a phase of declaratory and consultative processes to more practical and collaborative processes. India is a very strong advocate of collaboration in regional projects, particularly in areas such as infrastructure, poverty alleviation and dealing with cross border challenges such as natural disasters, pandemics like HIV/AIDS and Avian Flu and terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It is hoped that when India hosts the next SAARC Summit in the first quarter of 2007, the stage would have been set for a significant upgradation in regional cooperation within SAARC and the first steps would have been taken towards establishing a truly free trade area in South Asia.

Terrorist training camps in neighbouring countries

†949. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD:
SHRI RAM JETHMALANI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether training camps are being organized by terrorist in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and PoK;

†Original notice of question was received in Hindi.